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A BRIEF SKETCH

OF THE

Ancient History of Medicine, &c.,

BEING THE

ANNUAL ORATION

Delivered before the Hunterian Society at the London
Institution, on February 13th, 1878.

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BY

P. LODWICK BURCHELL,

M.B. Lond., F.R.C.S. Eng., L.S.A.,

Surgeon-Accoucheur to the City of London Lying-in Hospital,
and Honorary Librarian to the Society.

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With the Author's Compts.

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MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN.

Before entering upon the special duty of this evening, I feel an apology is due to you for my appearance here. I have, for many years, taken a deep interest in the welfare of this Society, and have derived a large amount of information at its various meetings. I, therefore, could no longer decline to try my best to fulfil the duties of the office of your Orator, though I am truly sensible of my inability to perform them with any credit to myself or interest to you.

I have experienced considerable embarrassment, and have even now altogether failed in selecting a subject worthy of your notice that I could treat with appropriate skill; but as the History of Medicine must interest all concerned in its practice, I have ventured to make *that* the subject of the few remarks I shall have the honor to address to you.

I must crave your indulgence for placing before you nothing new, and for merely going over the well-trodden ground, at the same time keeping at a respectful distance from all my predecessors.

Medicine dates the commencement of its History, from the fabulous notions of the ancients, as derivable immediately from their Gods. At any rate we may fairly conclude that men were naturally induced to practise it from casual observation of the diseases to which they themselves were liable, and this, of course, dates from the period of the origin of the human race.

When it began to be practised as an art, by a separate class of persons, it is not known. The Egyptians stand first, and for their courage and perseverance they had many privileges granted them by their rulers. It does not appear that the Egyptian Physicians were originally Priests also. But after a time, in consequence of great superstition, Priests took upon themselves the duties of Physicians, as that union of the two offices gave them great power over the minds of their dupes. This seems to have been the case with *all* Barbarians.

Little is known of the state of Physic amongst the Egyptians, they attributed its origin to *Thoth* the Mercury of the Greeks.

The commencement of its literature was handed down, inscribed in hieroglyphic characters, upon certain pillars. Agathodemon, father of Tat, transcribed them, and books were made and kept in the most sacred places of the Egyptian Temples. (Though this statement was supposed untrue at the time of Galen.)

In fact, Egyptian Physic is reputed to have been little else than absurd superstitions.

Origen informs us that they believed there were 36 *demons*, or Gods of the air, who divided the human body amongst them; that they had names for each of them, and that invoking *them* according to the part affected, the patient was cured.

To the Greeks, however, we are most indebted, namely *Apollo and Æsculapius*, the latter being the most celebrated of any. The curing of *wounds* (for they were a very warlike people), or the *Department* of *Physic*, called *Surgery*, was most practised by them. Their surgical appliances appear to have been very simple, chiefly fomentations, and their physic consisted principally in Incantations and Charms. As the Professors of Medicine knew but little of

Anatomy, and less of the Animal economy, it could not be expected they could employ any remedies founded on scientific bases.

But little advance was made for many ages, occasionally trials of empiricism led to some slight addition to the knowledge in the medical art.

Amongst the Greeks, however, *Æsculapius* was reckoned the most eminent, but no one took any prominent position till the time of *Hippocrates*, 400 years before the Christian Era. He was styled "*The Father of Physic.*" *Hippocrates*, however, was destined to accomplish a grand revolution, and although not much better acquainted with Anatomy than *Plato*, *Aristotle*, and the other Philosophers of those times he, nevertheless, established a system of *Medicine* which has been the admiration of every student of the science in each succeeding age. He, like our own countryman *Bacon*, saw the necessity of taking *facts* as the basis of all true *knowledge* and correct *reasoning*; he therefore, broke through the trammels of the speculative philosophy of the times, and by that bold measure effected more good for our profession than can readily be conceived. For the scholastic philosophy, at the same time that it overthrew the delusions of superstition, had founded an edifice of hypothetical errors on their ruins; and the important benefit that medicine derived from the labors of *Hippocrates was,* that *he,* rejecting all extraneous matter, got rid at once of the hypotheses that had been heaped upon it by philosophy; of the superstition which, in the course of ages, had grown up around and choked it, and this simply by taking the *Book of Nature* as his guide, and deducing his precepts from the result of actual observation. Hippocrates ascribed, and very properly so, a vast power to nature.

His acute and accurate observation of every circumstance, in the condition of the sick, contributed greatly to his justly acquired fame.

His power of prognosis was immense, as he observed the symptoms belonging to different maladies. The countenance of the patient was most strictly attended to, and from *it* he was frequently enabled to give a very accurate opinion, as to the serious nature or otherwise, of the disease about to take place.

Posture of the patient was noticed, and certainly is well worthy of observation, for much can be gleaned therefrom as to whether the side be chosen to lie upon or, as in great prostration, the person be stretched helplessly upon the back. Delirium was also observed and commented upon as very serious and critical. The condition of the respiration did not escape his acute eye. The excretions were minutely inspected.

The Pulse, in more ways than one, was noticed as diagnostic in disease, and he describes, very clearly, the importance of it in various conditions of the system.

His maxims for the preservation of health were such, that if carried out strictly in the present day, would greatly tend to prolong life. At that time of day men were not wont to over-tax their energies and live too fast as is almost universally the case now. In the treatment of all diseases, he made *nature* his hand-maiden and depended greatly upon the "*Vis Medicatrix Naturæ.*" All his appliances and remedies were employed to forward the natural efforts of the patient.

Hippocrates, in treating upon the cure of diseases, considered "that contraries or opposites, not similia similibus curantur" were indicated. He was not favorable to the sudden application of either extreme *heat* or *cold,* stating that "everything that runs to an excess is an enemy to nature."

Diet was much employed by him to correct the different ailments suffered by his patients; so greatly did he esteem dietetic treatment, and so proud was he of its salutary effects, that he was desirous of being considered its author. The dietary prescribed for persons suffering under different maladies was carefully considered and selected, and that again varied at different periods of life.

The directions when and how the Bath (which he greatly advocated), should be employed, was also considered. Purgatives were carefully used by Hippocrates, *because* those in use, especially in his time, were what we call *drastic,* such as white and black Hellebore, Scammony, &c.

Emetics were esteemed by him. He largely practised Blood-letting in all diseases where *it* was indicated; if situated above the liver he bled from the arm, if lower down he opened a vein of the foot, ankle or ham. Cupping was also in vogue, both dry and with scarifications. Diuretics and sudorifics were also brought into utility by this Physician. Fomentations of various kinds, Inhalations and Gargles he did not despise.

The way in which he gained his consummate practical information is so well known that a very brief glance at it will be sufficient for our present object. It had been the custom in Greece, from time immemorial, for the convalescents from various diseases when they came to the Temples for the purpose of returning thanks, paying their vows, and offering gifts for their recovery, to bring with them a History of the symptoms of their disorder, and an account of the curative means that had been used for their restoration.

These documents were preserved in the *Asclepiæ*, or Temples of Health, and one of the most famous of these Temples existed in Cos, the birthplace and chief residence of *Hippocrates.*

These Temples were presided over by an order of *Priest Physicians Asclepiadæ*, to whom was intrusted the care, and no doubt, the arrangement of these votive Tablets, into series suitable for reference, and adapted to practical purposes. Thus was accumulated an immense store of facts relating to diseases and their treatment, to which he had ready access, and thus was laid the foundation of *rational medicine;* at first but a very simple art, consisting entirely of "*dietetic and therapeutic precepts*," drawing no aid whatever from science, existing, in fact, before science dawned, or authentic history began.

It is not very clear, from the imperfect sketch of the life of *Hippocrates* that we possess, whether he was himself actually enrolled as a member of this order or not; but as the *Asclepiadæ* were the direct descendants from *Æsculapius*, and as *Hippocrates* claimed his origin from the same illustrious progenitor, there is every probability that he really was of the number.

We cannot but regret that *Hippocrates* could not enjoy the advantages which dissection would have afforded him. Had he possessed the same opportunities of cultivating *Anatomy* as fell to the lot of *Herophilus* and *Erasistratus*, it is impossible to divine what *his* transcendent genius might not have accomplished for medicine, since his description of the bones is given with so much accuracy. This, indeed, is easily accounted for ; for he himself tells us, that he had the gratification of studying the *human skeleton*.

In contemplating the rise of medicine, and the various impediments that have stood in the way of its advancement, nothing can excite so great surprise as the unaccountable apathy displayed by mankind respecting the study of Anatomy. It is scarcely credible that a science so useful, so indispensable indeed, and so interesting, as a knowledge of the mechanism of his own frame should have been so completely neglected by *man* as to have remained almost entirely dormant for more than 1700 years, from the time, indeed, of *Herophilus*, the first dissector of the human body, till the year 1315, when Mondini, Professor at *Bologna*, ventured to re-establish Anatomy.

I have thus briefly glanced at the labors of *Hipprocrates*, to whom we are indebted for so much that is useful in medical practice at the present day. He died at the age of 100,—361 years *before* the birth of Christ.

After his death other Physicians contributed their labors for the advancement of our art. *Praxagoras*, *Erasistratus* and *Herophilus*, the founders of the celebrated Medical School at Alexandria, broke through the prejudices of the age, and supported and encouraged by the first *Ptolemy* taught Anatomy openly, in the only way in which it *can* effectually be learned by actual dissection of the human frame. *Herophilus* is said by *Tertullian* to have dissected 600 bodies. We must, of course, here make great allowance for exaggeration; yet there is no doubt, that through his *whole* life, he was a zealous cultivator of his favorite science. At this very day we are in the habit of using names first given by him as *Torcular Herophili*, the Calamus Scriptorius and Duodenum.

Erasistratus apparently arrived very near to the discovery of the circulation of the Blood, for in a passage pointed out by *Galen*, he says "the veins arise from the part where the arteries (that are distributed to the whole body), have their origin, and penetrate to the sanguineous (or right) ventricle of the Heart, and the artery arises from the part where the veins have their origin, and penetrates to the Pneumatic (or left) ventricle of the Heart."

This description, confused as it is, seems to prove that he believed the venous and arterial systems to be more intimately connected than was at that time generally supposed. Other passages confirm the superiority of his ideas concerning the circulation. The prevalent doctrine was that the veins arose from the Liver, and the arteries from the Heart. Whereas, he contended that the Heart was the origin of both veins and arteries. With this conviction in his mind it could only have been his bending to the current notion of the age, which was, that the arteries contained air, that prevented him from anticipating Harvey's discovery.

According to Celsus, it was about *this* time that Medicine was first divided into "*three branches,*" viz. : the *Dietetic*, the *Pharmaceutical* and *Chirurgical.*

The first employed a *proper Regimen.*

The second, *Medicines.*

The third, *The operation of the Hands.*

The same author informs us that these three branches were practised by three distinct classes of men, *Physicians, Surgeons* and *Apothecaries.*

Previously to this there were but two divisions.

Physicians, who gave advice, and the *General Practitioners*, who performed any operations that were needed, and dispensed the medicines.

The next move was quite a revolution in Medicine, caused by the founding of the *Empiric Sect* of *Serapion,* of Alexandria, 287 years before the birth of Christ.

Next in order, as a man of mark, was *Asclepiades* in the century immediately before the Birth of Christ. He introduced the Philosophy of *Democritus* and *Epicurus,* and ridiculed the doctrines of *Hippocrates.*

He laughed at the *principle* called *nature,* and maintained that nothing happened without a cause, and that what was called *nature* was nothing more than *matter and motion. Asclepiades* argued against the doctrine of critical days in diseases.

After this *Themison* founded a sect called "*The Methodic* ;" he maintained that a knowledge of the causes of diseases was unnecessary, provided we had due regard to what diseases have in common, and analogous to one another.

In consequence of this principle he divided all diseases into two, or at most, three kinds.

The 1st included diseases arising from Stricture.

The 2nd included those diseases arising from Relaxation.

The 3rd those of a mixed nature of both these.

Themison classified disease under the heads, *Acute* and *Chronic.* That they *increase, attain their height* and *decline*, and that the treatment, whatever the disease, should be the same according as it was in one of these stages. *Soranus* appears to have been the most eminent of this sect, living under the *Emperors Trajan and Adrian,* and was a native of Ephesus.

Celsus was one of the most celebrated writers of Antiquity on Medicine. He is believed to have lived in the time of Tiberius, but the place to which he belonged is disputed, and it is also not agreed whether he was a regular Physician or not; certain it is, however, that his books on medicine are most valuable, and indeed are more so than any, except those of Hippocrates. His writings are well worthy a careful perusal, he thought for himself, and did not seem to bind himself to any particular school, but reviewed with great fairness and skill the doctrines of his predecessors.

Galen's name makes a considerable figure in the history of Physic. He flourished about 131 years after Christ, in Adrian's reign, and was a native of Pergamus. He undertook the reformation of medicine, and restored Dogmatism; he seems to have been of that sect which was called *Eclectic*. He followed Hippocrates much more than any of the other practitioners, and though several commented on his works yet Galen believed none of them understood his meaning. He, therefore, set about to explain the works of Hippocrates, and after this composed a system of his own which, however, notwithstanding its defects and absurdities, remained almost uncontradicted for a very long period; indeed it may be considered as having been the prevailing system till the inundation of the Goths and Vandals put an almost entire stop to the cultivation of letters in Europe.

He defines the art to be "one which teaches to preserve health and cure disease."

He afterwards says it is "a science which teaches what is sound and what is of an indifferent nature, or holds a medium between what is sound and what is the reverse."

Galen defined a disease to be "such a preternatural disposition or affection of the parts of the body as primarily and of itself hinders their natural and proper action."

Like Hippocrates, Galen distinguished diseases into acute and chronic; and with respect to their nature and genius, into benign and malignant, also into epidemic, endemic and sporadic. He divided the causes into external and internal. He then proceeds to consider the symptoms of diseases. After treating of symptoms he describes the signs of diseases, dividing them into *diagnostic* and *prognostic*. But during the general prevalence of the system of Galen there appeared some writers to whom medicine was indebted for improvements, at least in certain particulars. Amongst the most distinguished I may mention *Oribasius*, in the year 360, Physician to the Emperor Julian, *Œtius*, *Alexander* and *Paulus* (the last is said to have been the first man-midwife.)

From many passages in the writings of Œtius, who lived at the end of the 5th, or the beginning of the 6th century, may be gleaned that the actual and potential cautery were used very freely by the Physicians and Surgeons of that age. After the downfall of the Roman Empire, and when literature of every kind had been almost completely exterminated in Europe, medicine, though a practical art, shared the same fate with the more abstract sciences.

To the Arabian Physicians we are indebted both for the preservation of medical science, as it existed among the Greeks and Romans, and likewise for the description of some new diseases, particularly *Small-Pox.* Chemical remedies appear to have been introduced by this body of men. As before this period the Greek writers had been entirely neglected in consequence of nobody being able to read the language, and the Arabians, though principally copiers from them, enjoyed all the reputation that was due to the others. The Arabian physic was introduced into Europe very early, and with the most extravagant applause; and not only this but other branches of their learning came into repute in the west, insomuch, that in the 11th century, the studies of Natural Philosophy and the Liberal Arts were called "*The Studies of the Saracens.*"

The knowledge of Anatomy was not added to by them; this may be accounted for, as the Jewish tenets, adopted by the Mahomedans, compelled students to be satisfied with making their observations on the carcases of brutes. Nor did Surgery obtain any advance till the time of *Albucasis*, in the 12th century. Botany and Materia Medica were much improved by them. They were not so heroic in their administration of purgatives as the Greek and

Roman Physicians. A very trivial deviation from the practice inculcated by *Hippocrates* in relation to drawing blood gave rise to a very serious controversy. "*Whether blood, in an attack of Pleurisy, should be drawn from the affected side or not.*"

Hippocrates had directed the arm of the side affected to be employed, but the Arabians ordered the other; so violent was the disagreement that recourse was had to the edict of a university, that of Salamanca, and which ordered, by means of a decree, "that no one should dare to draw blood but from the opposite side," and endeavoured to procure an edict from the Emperor Charles 5th to second it, alleging that the other method was of no less pernicious consequence to medicine than Luther's heresy had been to religion.

The end of the 15th and beginning of the 16th century are famed for the introduction of Chemistry into Medicine, and the description of three new diseases, the *Sweating Sickness, the Venereal Disease* and the *Scurvy.*

Paracelsus, a famous Chemist, flourished at the beginning of the 16th century, at which period the Venereal disease made its appearance, and committed dreadful ravages.

The revival of learning that now took place throughout Europe; the appearance of these new distempers, and the natural fondness of mankind for novelty, contributed greatly to promote the advancement of medical as well as other sciences; while the introduction of the art of Printing rendered the communication of new opinions, as well as new practices, so easy a matter, that to enumerate even the *names* of those who have been justly rendered eminent for medical knowledge, would be a very tedious task.

In the year 1616, Harvey promulgated his new doctrine before the College of Physicians, but it was only in 1628 that he gave it publicity, namely, the "*Circulation of the Blood*," one of the most important discoveries ever made respecting the animal economy. He had the happiness to live to see the clamours of ignorance, envy and prejudice, with which it was abundantly assailed, totally silenced, and to know that it was universally received and established.

For there can be no doubt that it put the explanation of the phenomena, of the animal body, both in a state of health and disease on a more solid and rational footing than formerly. The discovery itself, more effectually than any reasoning, upset all the systems hitherto subsisting in the healing art. It has not, however, prevented the rise of numerous fanciful and absurd ones. These though fashionable for a short time, and strenuously supported by blind adherents, have yet in no long period fallen into deserved contempt. And notwithstanding the abilities and industry of Stahl, Hoffman, Boerhaave and Cullen, we may confidently venture to assert that no general system has yet been proposed which is not liable to innumerable and unsurmountable objections.

Very great progress has indeed been made in explaining the philosophy of the human body, from ascertaining by decisive experiment, the influence of the circulating, the nervous, and the lymphatic systems in the animal economy. But every attempt hitherto made to establish any general theory in medicine, that is to conduct the cure of every disease on a few general principles, has equally deviated from truth with those of Hippocrates and Galen, and has equally tended to mislead those who have adopted it. The art of medicine has been much more usefully improved by careful attention to the history, theory and practice of particular diseases, and by endeavouring to ascertain from cautious observation, the symptoms by which they are to be distinguished, the causes by which they are induced, and the means by which they are to be prevented, alleviated or cured.

Fabricius, to whom Harvey was a pupil many years before, was acquainted with and demonstrated both the valves at the origin of the arteries, and also in the veins of the extremities; but it was left for *him* to point out their real value. The improvement in the practice of Medicine, since this discovery, has been incalculable. It is not my intention to follow farther the history of our art as it is so well-known by all here, but in passing I must allude to the great debt due to the memory of the illustrious man who has given a name to our Society; to his acute and observant mind and indefatigable industry the world is indebted for a very great advance in our knowledge in many branches of our profession, for not only have Physiological, Pathological and Surgical knowledge been greatly enriched by his contributions, but the interesting department of Science, "Comparative Anatomy" owes a very considerable advancement to his persevering labors and great genius. And this department has been most successfully cultivated by our friend, that great and good man, Professor Owen, upon whose shoulders the mantle of John Hunter has so worthily fallen. For me to make any suggestions to my present audience, of the means to be adopted for the further progress of medical science, seems almost a work of supererogation, but the very richness and inexhaustible nature of the mine from which the metal may be dug; the innumerable subjects connected with the noble profession of medicine, from which selection may be made; the various modes in which those subjects may be handled, and the inferences or practical application that may be deduced have all contributed to render this task, gratifying though it be, one of more than ordinary perplexity.

On the one hand, any endeavour to elucidate a Medical, Physiological or Pathological question, would argue presumption on my part, since there is not one in the whole range of these Sciences that could not be better illustrated by all my hearers than I could hope to do it; while on the other hand an attempt to extol the dignity of our profession would, I felt, drive me to the utterance of commonplace platitudes, and the repetition of sentiments with which we have all been familiar year after year, ever since the commencement of the first session of our pupilage. It may be profitable to ponder over some of the causes that have tended to check the advancement of medicine. In the first place the uncertain nature of our profession, the ever varying phenomena that are presented to our view, the amazing difference that age, sex, climate, race, constitution and diathesis, occasion in the various individuals, the victims of the same identical disease. The method of arriving at a truthful deduction on scientific subjects, as suggested by Bacon, whilst it has achieved such glorious results for numerous departments of science, has accomplished little for Medicine. Nor is this to be wondered at, for the questions involved in the study of *it* do not permit of the application of the inductive philosophy with the same strictness that is adapted to almost all the other branches of scientific research.

It is this very uncertainty, this want of uniformity in the application of rules to practice in the adaptation of general laws to particular instances; this constant recurring newness in the features of the individual cases thrust upon our notice, which necessarily precludes its being received into the list of the exact sciences, and which indeed have disposed some philosophers, who will consider nothing scientific that cannot bear the test of the severe rules of inductive reasoning, to degrade it to the rank of a mere art. That this, however, is a most unjust appreciation of its merits must be confessed by everyone who reflects for a moment on the number of collateral branches of knowledge which must be studied, before even a superficial acquaintance with medicine can be attained, and on the enormous amount of mental labour which is required to cultivate anything approaching to a profound intimacy with it.

I need not insist upon the great improvement that has been made year by year, in the science of minute anatomy since the time of Harvey and even Hunter.

How wonderful the progress of science during the last half-century. What a revolution has been effected in Medicine and Surgery by the discoveries resulting from the careful and assiduous use of the microscope. Changes have supervened, far surpassing the most sanguine expectation of the most ardent minds. The value of the microscope, in connection with our science, can hardly be placed at too high an estimation. I believe it is the most effective power that has ever been called into requisition in aid of medical investigation, and I think that the time has arrived when it may be safely asserted that the microscope is to medicine what the telescope is to astronomy. To nothing is modern medicine more indebted than to that instrument; and there is every reason to hope that our obligation to it may, as time wends onwards, be multiplied manifold. At the present time that instrument has unrolled new worlds to the gaze of the Philosopher, and countless sources of rational delight it has opened up to the less scientific inquirer. The study of minute Anatomy, conducted by its means, has enlarged our knowledge of Physiology to an extent that certainly could not have been effected in any other manner; while the history of the growth of the ovum, and of development in general, has made us already so intimately acquainted with the mysterious working of providence, in these important particulars, as to leave apparently but little to be desired. It is to the microscope we are indebted for a knowledge of some obscure diseases hitherto only guessed at, and frequently erroneously, especially the exact nature of tumours, which can now be most accurately determined as to their malignancy or otherwise. And by the examination of the excretions as of the Kidneys, the condition if healthy or the reverse may be ascertained. In the hands of many the stethoscope reveals, with precision, the condition of the organs of the chest.

By another collateral branch, Chemistry, both organic and inorganic,—what wonderful strides have been made in advancing the scientific pursuit of our profession. All the fluids of the body undergo changes under the influence of disease, to be detected by the adaptation of organic chemistry. Pathological Anatomy improved, and wonderfully advanced by chemistry and the microscope, has brought to light morbid conditions hitherto unknown, and many errors have been detected and corrected. Is it not more than probable, as many now imagine, that by far the greatest number of diseases originate in the vital fluid contaminated in some of its essential properties? May not this morbid blood, poisoned from a thousand sources, be the cause of all the ills that flesh is heir to? Should this be the case, and the pathological chemistry of the fluids be ever more studied as successfully as the pathological anatomy of the solids has been, may not a more delicate organic chemistry both detect and enable us to render these special poisons in the system inert, or by means of the excreting organs, teach us to expel them altogether, such as the poison of Rabies, and thus lead us onward to that consummation, so devoutly to be wished, the freeing the body from those noxious atoms, which have driven it from the even and smooth course of health into the tumultuous vortex of disease? Physiologists, I believe, reckon the fluids of the body, as compared with the solids, as *ten* to *one*, so that there is a large mass of material to operate upon. Again, our Materia Medica has been immensely enriched by the aid of Scientific Chemistry; many new drugs have been added, before unknown, and the mode of preparation of those we have long used much improved, so much so, that we may reckon with tolerable certainty that the effects desired will be produced.

By the discovery and introduction of anæsthetics under whose influence excision of joints and many other most agonising operations, hardly otherwise to be endured by humanity, may now be most carefully and deliberately performed.

With all these improvements so patent to the world surely we ought not to be taunted with the assertion that medicine has remained stationary, while the Physical Sciences have made a bound, unexampled in the previous history of their existence.

We can show them that few have progressed with more rapidity, and not *one* with so much benefit to mankind as that which we cultivate and practise.

This should not, however, induce those who have the time, means and opportunity for increased energy of action to sit down quietly in indolence and say enough has been done for our generation. It ought rather to stimulate them to their best endeavours to add something, however trifling, to the common stock of knowledge.

There is an unfounded apprehension sometimes expressed that the reputation of indulging a taste for scientific pursuit will injure its possessor in the eyes of the public; because it is imagined that a man who devotes himself to the abstruseness of science will lose his disposition for the routine of practical engagements, and not give up the time necessary for the proper performance of his ordinary duties. This feeling was much more prevalent in my early days than now, and I must confess there was *at that period* some ground for it, but *now* scientific pursuits are much more general than they were then.

I need not observe, gentlemen, that this is a specious fallacy, that the pursuit of science is much more attractive than the dull monotony of practice, we need none of us be told; but that the blending of science, with his every day employment, unfits the Physician or Surgeon for his practical duties, is a position unwarranted by reasoning, and negatived by many splendid examples among our own contemporaries, many of whom might be mentioned as belonging to our own cherished society which would prove my assertion. With the vulgar such a notion may somewhat prevail, but there is scarcely an individual amongst the better class in these days who, whatever may be his professional occupation, does not dedicate some part of his time to one or other branch of scientific acquirements. Such a man will know and feel how much refreshment there is in diverting the mind occasionally away from the common concerns of life to some object of special interest, for it is in a *variety* rather than an *absolute suspension* of mental labour that relief is afforded to the jaded mind.

It is true there are fewer inducements for young men to enter the profession of medicine than are to be found amongst our brethren of the Church and the Law; more encouragement ought to be held out to the flower of the rising generation to join our ranks, since the health, and consequently the happiness of the community are intrusted, under Providence, to their keeping. With this view some posts of distinction should be put aside or new ones created and appropriated to the Profession of Medicine; and it would soon be discovered that a preliminary scientific education, and the knowledge acquired in the intimate intercourse with society enjoyed by the medical practitioner, by no means disqualified him from undertaking places of trust, and executing delicate and important services.

In spite of the many drawbacks I think I am correct in the assertion that at no previous epoch of our History are we held by the population at large in higher estimation. The labours of the most scientific amongst us are regarded with the greatest respect and admiration, and we are relied upon with the utmost confidence.

Pope, in his inimitable translation of Homer, says—

> "A wise Physician skilled our wounds to heal,
> Is more than armies to the public weal."

shows how medical men were estimated in early days, and I think I may venture to assert we are held in no less estimation now.

Our profession has, for many years, been held up by the ignorant and unreflecting to receive the shafts of malice and derision. All these must necessarily have lent a hand to obstruct the onward march of medicine. But it is not uncommon for all of us to meet with great difficulties at times in the treatment of cases, mainly in consequence of the interference of persons in the management of their own attacks of illness. We all of us must acknowledge that the views the public entertain of Medicine are very inconsistent and erroneous. They seem to invest disease with a personal individuality, and regard it as a substantive enemy, whom it is necessary to conquer by the strong hand, and think *that* man the cleverest doctor who can knock down each variety of ailment in the quickest manner by a specific process. This leads very commonly, on the part of the patient, to the desire to take the management of his complaint greatly into his own hands, and to act as he will tell you upon the dictates of common sense; forgetful that common sense, although an excellent guide in the ordinary affairs of life, will not stand in lieu of the definite principles and special systems inseparable from the prosecution of any scientific problem.

Dr. Whately has an apt illustration in point. "A sailor will despise the pretentions of medical men, and prefer treating disease by common sense; but he would ridicule the proposal for navigating a ship by common sense without regard to the maxims of nautical art."

If individuals would rely as implicitly on their medical adviser as they actually do on their lawyer, and *would* do on the captain of their vessel in a stiff gale of wind, one of the greatest impediments to the progress of medicine would disappear; one, too, that leads to innumerable evils, of which the tendency to fall into quackery is not the least. We must all lament the extent to which empiricisms of various kinds are encouraged in the present day, even by persons in high positions, and accounted of *sane* though perhaps not *strong* mind. But this is by no means an anomaly; we have abundant proof that no age has been exempt from the pollution of the impudent charlatan and ignorant pretender, nor will any future be, so long as the love of the marvellous exerts such a powerful influence over the human mind. Bacon tells us, "the weakness and credulity of man is such that he often prefers a mountebank or a witch before a regular physician;" and Pliny writes "of all arts, medicine is the only one of which anyone may boast a *knowledge* and have *immediately* ready listeners."

I need not remind you that the most rampant delusion at present in vogue is homœopathy, and the puerilities and contradictions of this pseudo-science are so great as to render it inconceivable that it should have taken such a hold on the imagination of the public. It must be a subject of great regret to us that so many legally qualified practitioners also have ceased to regale themselves at the pure fountain of scientific knowledge, and have drunk so deeply of this turbid and corrupted stream. We must deplore their loss as an army in the field would both deplore and pity its deserters. But like a well ordered armament, we may feel that we are strong enough to dispense with their co-operation altogether; but however much we must despise the principles of *Homœopathy*, we cannot but admit that the mode of action, pursued by its followers, will convince all doubters of the wonderful powers of nature, and keep firmly in the mind the principle that "fas est ab hoste doceri." I need not insist on the sacrifices we make for the public at large. The very fact of the number of the societies similar to this, existing in London and many large towns, is sufficient evidence of our disinterested zeal. When it is considered that men of the first eminence in the profession meet night after night, at no little personal inconvenience to themselves, and probably at some pecuniary loss, to compare with their brethren the result of their experience in disease, and thus render themselves more fitted for its treatment, not for their own sake but that of the public; I think we have a right to arrogate to ourselves a consideration far beyond that which is vouchsafed to us as a body. You have doubtless observed gentlemen, and perhaps have thought it strange, that I should not have introduced the names of many of our own friends and colleagues as having done something for the advance of Medicine and Surgery, but I omitted mentioning *any*, designedly, for amongst so many who have done good and laudable service, I felt it would be invidious to particularise; for though our Society is numerically small, I am proud to know that the number of those who have added good practical additions to our knowledge is by no means contemptible for their name is legion.